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# ROLE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS INFLUENCE TOWARDS FOOD CHOICES AMONG HOUSEHOLD IN KIAMBAA SUB COUNTY, KENYA.

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A sample of 138 households. Data was collected using interview schedule on a sample of 138 respondents living in Kiambaa sub-county. Data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively, quantitative data using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Ms-excel computer software to generate frequencies and percentages which were presented discussed and interpreted in line with the study objectives. The findings established statistically significant between social cultural factors and food choices in Kiambaa Sub County. Social interactions at 86% which include the nature of interpersonal relationships, social status at 70% and traditions at 78% in households provided an important set of interpersonal relationships in influencing food choice. This study findings shows majority of women at 86% are actively involved in decision making especially on the food to be eaten at home therefore become the burden carrier of the household activity and balancing other roles as homemaker, mother and income earners. This study concludes that factors influencing food choices are positive and negative therefore it is importance to consider sociological approach to food choices. This study recommends policy and strategic approach to food choices, household target in proper utilization of research findings and further study on assessment of influence of work on behaviour towards food choices.

## Abstract

This study focused on factors influencing households' behavior and attitudes towards food choices in Kiambaa sub-county, Kiambu County. Therefore, this study explored socio-cultural factors on household food choices. Structural functionalism and social learning theory provided the theoretical understanding to discuss the relationship between variables. This study employed descriptive design to randomly select a

## 1.0 Introduction

Food is basic for averting hunger and maintaining physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing for every human being. Food satisfies our palate and makes us happy, emotionally and socially content. The Pan-European Survey of Consumer Attitudes to Food, Culture and Gender found that the top five influences on food choice in 15 European member states are social status/social interaction (74%), price/availability (43%), taste/preference (38%), convenience (32%) and individual preference (29%). These are average figures obtained by grouping 15 European member states results, which differed significantly from country to country. Glanz et al (1998) observed that in the USA the following order of factors affecting food choices has been reported: taste, cost, convenience and family preference.

United Nation Development Programmes (UNDP) (2012) on world states found that food choices are used in demonstrating group acceptance, conformity and social function. Food choices are based on some expectations and attitudes, economic factors, ethical concerns or socio-cultural elements. Public, media, community and political interest on food choices are important to understand social desirability of foods. Therefore it is important to integrate sociological approach to understanding food choices. African countries consume varied types of foods influenced mainly by different beliefs and thus varied areas will have preference to certain type of food. Kiriti and Tisdell (2011) notes that evaluation studies in Kiambaa Sub County have focused on describing how poor health can be improved by food but there is a gap especially in understanding sociological factors influencing food choices. The choice of food consumed in Africa is determined by a number of

factors, including availability of natural resources, cultural beliefs, social status and traditional taboos. However, FAO (2012) states that these factors place limits in one way or another on the intake of food thus women are deprived of essential component of food. United Nation Development Programmes (UNDP) (2012) adds that in East Africa urbanization has contributed to a shift away from traditional high fiber, home-cooked foods to the consumption of pre-prepared, packaged and processed ready to eat foods. In addition Maundu and Kibuye (2014) notes that the elevated consumption of fats, refined sugars, refined flours and preservatives as a result of these new foods, has resulted in adverse effects in the urban East African population. Recent evidence from the urban center of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania revealed a positive relationship between the consumption of a Westernized and globalized food to economic growing areas.

According to the 2011 population census results, the national population stands at 40 million. Many household within Kenya food patterns have shifted away from the use of indigenous crops e.g. millets, sorghum, pulses and starchy roots to a greater consumption of introduced staple foods, including wheat, rice and hydrogenated vegetable fats. However, Oniang'o (2013) observed that there is disequilibrium especially on household who are vulnerable on making varied food choices influenced by cultural values. Food choices have been analyzed in Kiambaa Sub County however there are no measures that address non-health related factors and gender preferences in a systematic manner therefore this study focused on socio-cultural factors, economic factors and gender preference as factors influencing food choices. According to KNBS (2011) report evaluation studies indicated limited studies on food choices particularly in Kiambaa Sub County. These are some factors that influence the current study to identify gender preference in influencing household's behaviour, habits and attitudes on food choices by describing socio-cultural factors, economic factors and gender preference factors. This study thus describes the development of multidimensional motive of food choices.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Food choices are greatly influenced by economic, cultural and social factors. However at a household level gender disaggregated data has not been explored where behaviour and attitudes towards food choice preference occurs and emanate. At the household level very important decision making and much gender inequality is experienced. This food de-structuration has led to increase in convenience

consumer foods, compression of time and individualism. Most food choice decision is however made by significant member of the household. Thus this study explored factors influencing household food choices in Kiambaa Sub County. There are no measures that address non health related factors in a systematic manner. Evaluation studies indicated limited studies on this field particularly in this area. Hence there is need to sociologically establish critical factors that stimulate this demand by understanding the attitude and behavior towards food choices among households.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Economic Factors Influencing Gender Food Choices

Food choices are vital to socio-economic development, given that it enables people to participate in economic, social and political development. It is also an important indicator of quality of life and a major contributor to human capital. Awareness leads to improvement in life expectancy and reduces production time wasted, thus resulting in economic development. According to WHO (2012) report indicate that the linkage of food choices to long-term positive economic growth is important, much stronger than is generally understood. Therefore the motive of food choice need to be a conscious decision made to enhance long term effect on particular household members. Further on how to manage the resources at a household level. Human capital is key for greater outcome in the household level and at society at large. Economic distinction play an important role in the life of an individual in that the privileges, power, self-determination, opportunity and the ability of an individual control on choices.

Maundu and Imbinumi (2003) noted that urbanization and increasing incomes promote consumption of diverse foods and facilitate change in food choices from basic staples such as maize to cereals that require less preparation like wheat products and processed foods. These provide a good understanding by discussing on diversity associated with food attitudes and behavior as seen in Kenya. In Africa, urbanization has occurred in an environment of consistent economic decline. Moreover economic decline have contributed to rapid rural to urban migration of millions of people seeking a chance at a better life. A study conducted by UNDP (2012) shows that over 70 per cent of the urban population in sub-Saharan Africa lives in slum, with little or no access to basic services and food. In other parts of the world, urban transition has been linked to industrialization and greater

economic opportunities. However, according to WHO (2012) urbanization is also associated with negative changes of food choices transition that include quantitative and qualitative shifts in the structure away from staples like roots and tubers towards more livestock products and vegetable oils, with higher energy dense diets, more fat, added sugars in foods, greater saturated fat intake.

Whether cost is prohibitive depends fundamentally on a person's income and socio-economic status. De Irala-Estevez et al (2000) provides an important insight on low-income groups that they have a greater tendency to consume one particular type of food and in particular have low intakes of fruit and vegetables. However, Mutwa and Indaba (2009) explains that access to more money does not automatically equate to a better quality choice but the range of foods from which one can choose should increase. Our pockets and the economy influence how people shop and what they eat. Gassier (2008) argues that convenient food, that is junk and highly processed foods are relatively expensive than the healthier options available. So majority make an option for the affordable foods.

In view of this study the foods choices may not be as expensive as always assumed. Individuals internalize and understand that by adding an extra shilling, they are investing better life. Money, values, and consumer skills all affect what a person purchases. Kitange *et al*, (2015) recognize that the price of a food, however, is not an indicator of its value. Cost is a complex combination of a food's availability, status, and demand. The current study therefore gave attention to cost of food and exposed factors that influence food choices so as to provide knowledge.

Devine et al (2010) explains that economic status of a community includes level of income, education or occupation. Education is associated with acquisition of beliefs and knowledge of a person ability to integrate healthy behaviour to their day to day activities and choices. Strong social networks predict more regular use of ideas to address community issues. Some of the barriers to economic stability include; lack of knowledge, accessibility and availability to services in the community. Studies indicate that the level of education can influence food choices from childhood to adulthood. Kearney (2000) observed that education has a role to encourage right attitude and values among learners that promote physical, social and emotional development. These values are passed down to future generations. This literature recognizes the education system help households understand food habits and direct action when individuals are unsure

how to apply their knowledge. De Almeida *et al* (2000) add that information disseminated on food comes from a variety of sources and is viewed as conflict or is mistrusted, which discourages motivation to change. Thus, it is important to convey accurate and consistent messages through various education channels, on food choices.

Geoff *et al* (2008) explain that the level of education is very important in the life of every human being to interpret situation and make informed choices. Therefore it would help people to make many wise decisions about food. For example, what type to eat, when to eat, how many times you would eat a day and what combinations of foods are safe? Education also gives the consumer information which would help them to buy food wisely from the market place. Kinyua (2014) explains that when the society is provided with the relevant skills needed to make food choices then there is formation of certain food habits, behaviour, attitudes and changes others. For example, education can make people to decide on what to eat at every meal because they have learnt about its benefits and not to eat certain foods because of their harmful effects.

Availability and accessibility of food are some important factors to determine foods eaten. Most people depend on locally grown food products for their basic or staple food. Some foods can grow only in certain types of geographic locations and this determines the foods available in such locations. Hall *et al*, (2011) states that accessibility to food is an important economical factor influencing food choice, dependant on resources such as transport and geographical location. While Donkin *et al* (2000) adds that food tends to be more expensive when available within towns and cities compared to the outskirts. However, Dibsall *et al*, (2003) expounds that improving access alone does not increase purchase of additional fruit and vegetables, which are still regarded as prohibitively expensive.

Geoff *et al*, (2008) explains that distribution of food whether due to harsh geographical or climatic conditions in a region, or to poverty resulting from a lack of purchasing power contributes greatly to the severe imbalance of food choices throughout Africa. Therefore this study purposed to explore on the influence of accessibility and availability to food choices. Female versus male ratios in Kenyan decision-making institutions are highly skewed against women and they experience unfavorable situation especially economically when supporting their families with food.

### **Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Food Choices**

Society is described as a group of people interacting in a territory who have shared institutions, characteristic relationship and common culture. Thus cultures develop from learned shared beliefs, altitudes and behaviour transmitted to members. Social factors and cultural practices in Kenya have a very great influence on what people eat, on how they prepare food, on their feeding practices and on the foods rituals they prefer. However, Berkman, (2009) notes that some traditional food practices and taboos in some societies may contribute to among particular groups of the population to have a traditional food pattern. Allen (2009) states that a cultural group provides guidelines regarding acceptable foods, food combinations, eating patterns and behaviors. Compliance with these guidelines creates a sense of identity and belonging for the individual.

Ares & Gambaro, (2011) state that Social cultural interaction develop peoples intention and actions in their experiences and personal communication thus understanding of this minimize misinterpretation, and misjudgment thus more insight of the community perspective and ability to develop mutual relations with other members of the society. To engage a community beliefs and behaviour are important for cultural encounter with the opportunity for achieving shared goals. Therefore there is cultural sensitivity through awareness and reduce biasness. Within large cultural groups, subgroups exist that may practice variations of the group's eating behaviors, though they are still considered part of the larger group.

Early socialization practice emphasize primary role of women as mothers and wives thus influence girl's expectations for future choices. African culture is a barrier to development because of culturally sanctioned biases against women and provides excuses for men. Cultural biases operate at all levels ranging from national, institutional level, government policy, community level and household level (Kiriti et al 2011). Cultural orientation is present in every interaction which is an indicator of a person behaviour and altitudes. Therefore cultural identity is an ongoing process as a person is exposed to more different values and behaviour which people choose to adopt or not.

Sociological understanding of food emphasize on culture to food perception, choices and behaviour (Ares 2011). Therefore food is seen as construct within social aspect which is linked to the culture in which the person is functioning. Consequently consumption of food may hold different messages to group members. Social meaning is woven around every food event in complex strand assimilation of these meaning begins in childhood and become

implicit part of adult behaviour and routine understood and carried out without conscious thought or effort.

Kinyua (2014) asserts that the family is the basic social unit where social values and behavior are formed, food being a social pattern which may be passed from childhood to adulthood and sometimes difficult to face alteration later in life. The family is widely recognized as being significant in food decision. Food choices take place at home because family and friends can be a source of encouragement and sustaining food choices which are acceptable to an individual and influence eating habits. Although the majority of food is eaten in the home, and sometimes higher proportion as eaten outside the home, e.g. in schools, at work and in restaurants as a secondary socialization. The venue in which food is eaten can affect food choice, particularly in terms of what foods are on offer. However, Faugier *et al* (2001) argues that access to food options is limited in many work and school environments. This is particularly true for those with irregular hours or with particular requirements e.g. vegetarian. Devine *et al* (2007) notes that with the majority of adult women and men in employment, the influence of work on behaviors towards food choices is an important area to look into as it eventually affects the household.

According to Beardworth and Lancashire (2002) the influence of the environment on food habits derives from a composite of ecological and social factors. Foods that are commonly and easily grown within a specific region frequently become a part of the local food pattern. However, modern technology, agricultural practices, and transportation methods have increased the year-round availability of many foods, and many foods that were previously available only at certain seasons or in specific areas are now available almost anywhere, at any time.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Structural functionalism and social learning theories are used in this study. Structural functionalism is one of the major theoretical perspectives in sociology by Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer and Talcott parsons who were especially interested in social order grounded in the action frame of reference in the social system to achieve stability and solidarity (Bandura, 1977). Structural functionalism theory advanced by Talcott Parsons (1930s) guided by the assumption that each part of society contributes to the stability and harmony of the whole society and every part of society produce order, stability, and productivity. When one part of the system is not working or is dysfunctional; it affects all other parts



and creates social problems. Talcott Parsons proposed a two-category classification of approaches to the analysis of food systems. The theory looks at society through a macro level orientation which is a broad focus on social structure that shapes society and believes that society evolves like organism. Functionalisms based on an analogy between a society and an organic system. Just as the body is made up of different parts, each one having a unique and indispensable role in the maintenance of the living system, society is seen as made up of institutions which in this study is household make their own contribution to the cohesion and continuity of the social system. Functionalism has been used primarily by social anthropologists studying food systems. Its drawback is that it offers a static view of human social organization and account for the food choices in households. In relation to the study, it is useful in developing certain food related questions for example what are the social patterns of food choices and consumption among household members in Kiambaa Sub County. How food choices are reinforced by different gender? Can dysfunctional features in food systems be identified and what are their implications on values and behavior of household members in Kiambaa Sub County?

Structuralism explains beyond the relationship seeking goal of functionalism, delving deeper to uncover the principles and structures behind the surface linkages. It aims to analyze every structure of human thought processes in the case of food, looking at the rules and conventions that govern the ways in which food items are classified, prepared and combined with each other. The theory relates

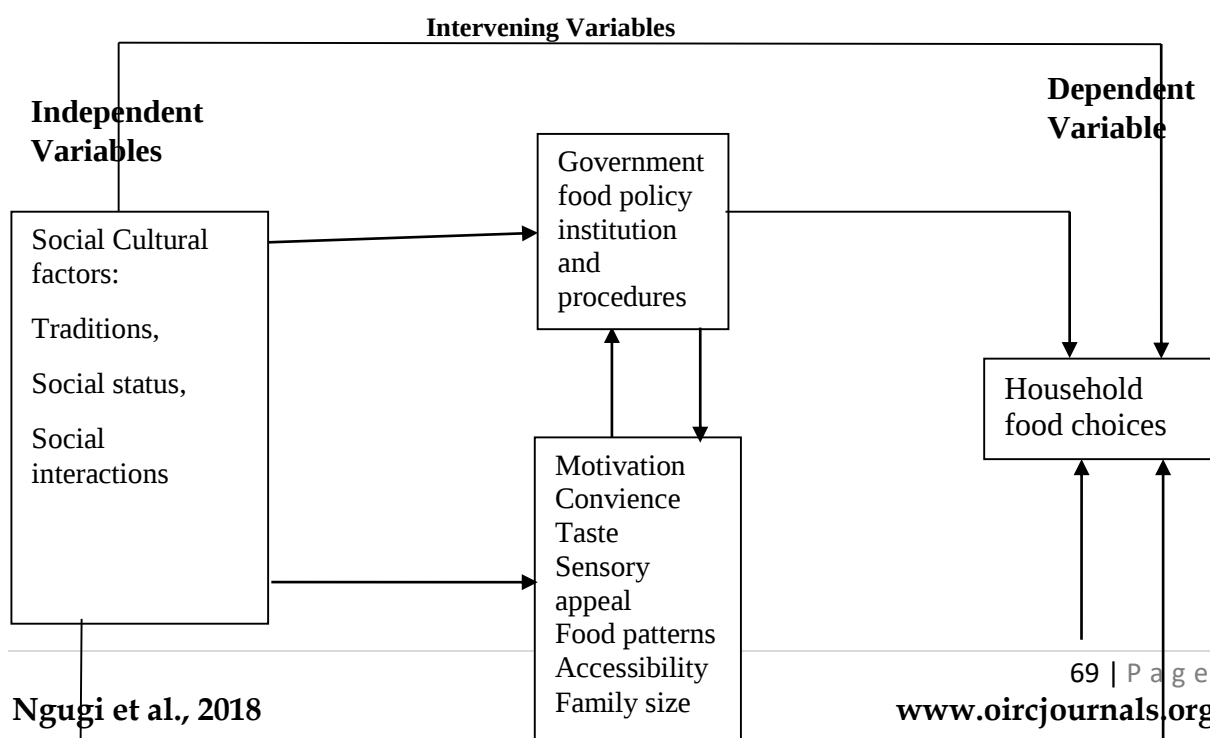
#### Independent Variable

human action with goals and consequences. The theory further seeks to resolve traditional structuralism to explain social phenomena in terms of individual action. Thus, it is useful theory for exploring factors influencing food choices in Kiambaa household.

The social learning approach argues that learning occurs within a social context where people learn from one another through observation, imitation and modeling. Food can be treated as a code and the messages that it encodes are messages about social events and about social relations which is in transition. The position within social learning theory comes from the assertion that an item of food constitutes an item of information. Therefore food signifies cultural meanings to those who consume it but not all varieties of foodstuffs are necessarily significant at a collective social level. Some are significant only at a household level. This distinction, allowing for the accommodation of personal meanings within a system of shared meanings, permits the identification of the most important foods in a given social setting which experience change. Social being with diverse motives, intention change and transform their social world.

#### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework below illustrates the relationship between the variables of the study. The diagrammatical presentation indicates social cultural, economic factors, and individual factors as independent variable while food choices within household as dependent variable.



**Source: Self**

**Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework**

The relationship between the dependent and independent variable in the study are represented by the arrows as shown above the illustration above of the conceptual framework. The left side of the conceptual framework represents independent variable while right side represents dependent variable. Social cultural factors influencing household behaviour and attitudes towards food choices include social interactions, traditions, social desirability, and social status which according to the study are significant. At the center of the framework are the intervening variables which influence social economic factors and in turn determine the outcome of household food choices which are motivation, sensory appeal, convenience, food pattern and accessibility. Government policy is also intervening variable because of different policies that the government implements or recommends in terms of regulation of price and availability.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

#### Study Area

The study location was Kiambaa Sub County, Kiambu County to the north of Nairobi Kenya. The 2009 census projected Kiambu county population to be 1,766,058 and projected it to be 2,032,464 people by end of 2017 (KNBS 2011). Kiambaa Sub County covers 2,153 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of 513,703 with 469,244 numbers of households (KNBS, 2011). The choice of location is due little information on the study of food choices and health status. The study location is both rural and urban area. The main economic activities are agriculture and small scale business. There are unique features, varying landscape and hilly areas. There are two main Rivers namely Gichi and Karia within Kiambaa Sub County. The study area has a fast-growing population thus the current study explored factors influencing food choices particularly socio-cultural factors, economic factors and gender factors

#### Research Design

This study adopted both quantitative and qualitative data to achieve the specific objective. Descriptive

research design was used to generate qualitative data while quantitative data was necessary for numerical. Descriptive study describes systematic situation and the experiences of the people in a broad everyday context. Qualitative research data is non numeric because the designs, techniques and measures employed generated responses in the form of words. This design enable the study to explore qualitatively the role of social-cultural factors such as gender, social relationships; the economic factors; income level, education level, food availability and accessibility and gender preference factors of food choices in Kiambaa Sub-county. The sampling procedure, data collection methods and tools used to ensure collection of qualitative data consistent with the aim and nature of the study.

#### Unit of Analysis

The units of analysis of this study were the households in Kiambaa Sub-county. The members of the household 18yrs and above constituted adult population who formed part of the respondent.

#### Population and Sampling Procedure

The population of the study was all households within Kiambaa Sub- County. A sample of 138 households was obtained through area sampling and simple random sampling in Kingothua, Raini, Karuri and Muchatha. The method of sampling is appropriate to ensure proportional representation of the different population. The choice of the four areas is informed by the four focus areas of the current study objectives social cultural factors, economic factors and individual factors.

#### Sample Size

The value of P is then estimated based on the researcher's personal judgment or result of a pilot study. For this research, personal judgment was applied. For Sample Size determination, since the population of interest is known 10% of the population will be used while the study will adapt the standard Fischer's *et al*, (1998) formula where  $p=0.5$ , as elaborated by Mugenda, 2008 to arrive at the desired sample size  
 $n = \text{sample size}$

z = Standard deviation which corresponds to confidence interval (1.96)

p = Proportion of study units

d = Degree of accuracy, (0.05).

Formula is  $n = \frac{Z^2 p \times q}{D^2}$

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.1 \times 0.9}{0.05^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3.8416 \times 0.1 \times 0.9}{0.0025}$$

$$n = 138$$

### Data Collection

The study obtained data from both primary and secondary sources so as to provide comprehensive information necessary in answering the study questions. Primary data was through interview schedule while secondary data through reports, books, internet, journal, publications and documents. The interview schedule meant to collect data from the respondent that is required in all objectives to measure individual attitudes and give a personal experience. Direct observation was used to enable the researcher obtain data such as altitude and behaviour towards food choices that may not be necessary have been brought out from interview schedule. The choice of interview schedule collected wide range of socioeconomic characteristic. Likert types of questions were used to assess opinions on food choices. Respondent gave their informed

consent for participation before they are interviewed. The overall study findings are presented in a comprehensive study report.

## 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

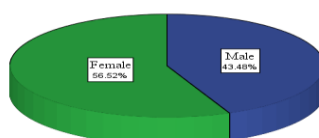
### Results

A total of the 138 interview were conducted to the respondents in Kiambaa Sub County. The response rate 99% and is statistically adequate to facilitate decisions of generalization of findings from sample from the entire population from which the sample was drawn that were sampled for their diversity. Data from the interview schedule are presented to illustrate the structure of the respondent's experiences towards influence of food choices and thus represent bases of the study.

### Background characteristic of the Respondents

#### Gender of the Respondents

This study involved both male and female headed households by assessing the role played in the running of their family. In the family gender roles duties and responsibility are specified by social cultural factors in any given society. Female are expected to perform household duties and caring for the children on the other hand male are the bread winners and protectors of the household.

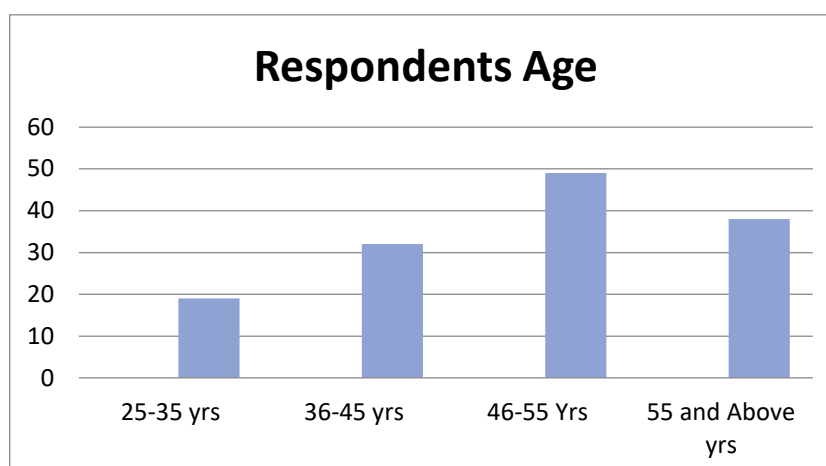


**Figure 4.1: Gender of respondents**

As shown in figure 1 above, majority of the respondents surveyed were females representing 56.52% of all the individuals while male respondents were 43.48%. This presented both the views of female and male. The members of the household were both female and male however in every household one adult female or male was interviewed. In the household gender roles refer to

expected duties and responsibility mostly influenced by the social cultural setting. In this study it was found out that majority of the respondents were female closely followed by male. Female headed households are accorded all privileges and respect as male. Female headed household commonly resulted after death of husband and a few cases divorce.





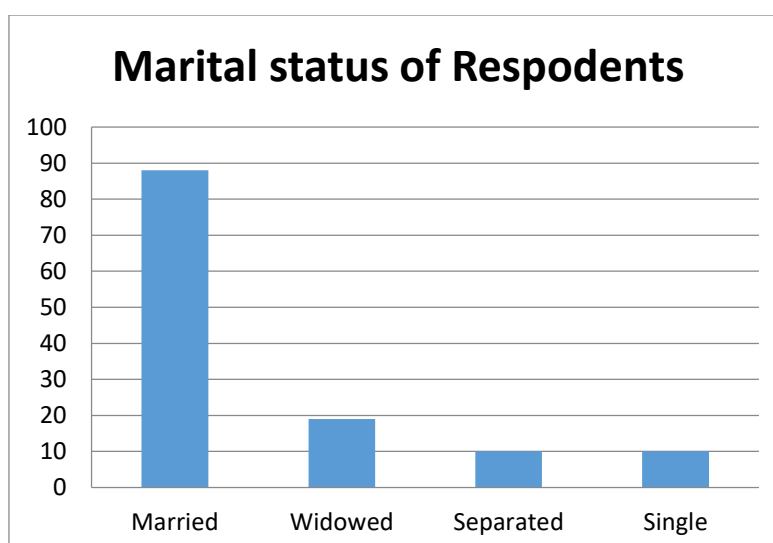
**Figure 4.2: Age of the respondents**

The study considered any female and male household head that were above 25 years. The society accord various roles different members of the household according to age for example decision making, domestic work of cooking, washing clothes, cleaning and digging. During the interview the respondents were asked to state their age and the particular age grouped and presented above. Respondents were asked to indicate their age categories and findings presented in Figure 4.1 majority of the individuals were in the age bracket of between 46-55 years. This age bracket represented 49 % of the sample. It was followed by those in the age bracket of between 55 years and above, standing at 36%. Then represented were those in the age brackets of between 36 years and 45 years with 32% and those above 25- 35 years old which stood at 19% each. It is worth noting that the largest majority of the study respondents are

individuals in their productive age who are involved in provision for their families and make informed food choice. The study considered those above 25yrs as adults who are capable of responding to the questions in a more informed way and necessary information for the study. The table above show even distribution of individuals within age categories.

#### **Marital Status of Respondents**

The study finding reveal 88 % of the respondents were married while 19% were widowed. Further 10 % of the respondents were single while 10 % were separated. The findings show that many women are involved in family responsibility thus making. The figure below show the marital status of the respondents.



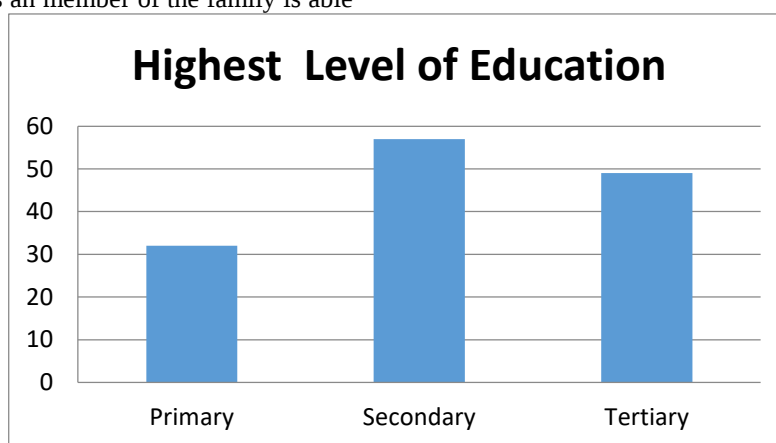
**Figure 4.3: Marital Status of the respondents**

Majority of the respondents were individuals who were married and staying with their families thus able to give relevant information on the necessary background information of the household. Marriage also entailed extra responsibilities to provide for the family, how to sustain livelihoods of the people and making family decisions. The family provides the basic needs of that are food, clothing and shelter. This enhance a sense of continuity of the family line and belonging thus an member of the family is able

to adapt to general acceptable behaviour from family being the primary socialization. However secondary socialization also takes place through interacting with other members of the society and peers.

#### **Level of Education**

Respondents were asked to state the highest level of education achieved and the responses were presented below. Education is a basic human right where an individual is able to reason logically and support their opinion.



**Figure 4.4: Highest Education Level of the Respondents**

Majority of the respondents had education beyond the primary level. Most of them had tertiary education representing 49.2% while 57% of the respondents had secondary education and 32% had achieved primary level of education. This implied that all the respondents had attained at least primary level education and therefore they were able to understand better the subject matter of the study and answer the question from an informed point of view. Most of the respondent had adequate information to make an informed decision concerning food choices. Exposure to education makes the respondent have a platform to argue their point of view and therefore give bases of their thoughts.

This section covered the length of stay in the area to understand whether an individual has been able to adapt to food choices or had grown in Kiambaa Sub County. Questions are asked on how long the respondent had lived in this area to understand whether they were born in this area or have acquired food choices influences from other areas. When a person stay is born in a particular area or has lived in an area for a long period of time the information help in understanding how their culture has influence many of the decision they have made. Through interaction also individual also acquire way of life due to the social environment influence.

**Table 4.1: Period of living in the area**

|                 | Frequency  | Percent      |
|-----------------|------------|--------------|
| Less than 5 yrs | 6          | 2.9          |
| 5 - 10 yrs      | 4          | 2.9          |
| 11 - 15 yrs     | 10         | 7.4          |
| 16 - 20 yrs     | 14         | 10.3         |
| 20 yrs and more | 104        | 76.5         |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>138</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Table 1 above shows that majority of the respondent surveyed had stayed in the village for more than 20

years. This group represented 76.5% of the respondents. This was followed by 10.3% of the

respondents who had stayed in the village for more than 16 years, and then 7.4% who had stayed for between 11 years - 15 years. 2.9% of the respondents had stayed in the village for between 5- 10 years and another 2.9% had stayed for less than 5 years. The findings revealed that majority of the households had learned and adopted food patterns within the period they had stayed in the area.

### **Social-Cultural Factors Influencing Food Choices**

#### **Tradition**

The respondents pointed out that traditions regulate food habits that tend to remain stable throughout generations. Majority of the respondents had a desire to be accepted in their social environment thus in

every culture there some restriction and some foods may be forbidden which is passed on from one generation to another. Therefore culture grow over a period of time hence will shape food choice, pattern of cooking and serving. In any given environment traditions guide values that are generally acceptable which influence an individual behaviour and altitude towards the choices and especially for this study food choices. Majority of the respondent were comfortable with their tradition of foods however they found it hard to mix with other groups who were practicing different choices. Some members of the community were strict in trying to protect what they believe and hold on as true and acceptable. The table below shows the responses of tradition on influence on the choice of food.

**Table 4.2: Cross-tabulation for tradition and food choices**

|                                           | Tradition |    | Total |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------|----|-------|
|                                           | Yes       | No |       |
| Does tradition influence the kind of food | 46        | 32 | 78    |
|                                           | 42        | 18 | 60    |
| <b>Total</b>                              | 88        | 60 | 138   |

**Table 4.3: Chi-square test for tradition and food choices**

|                    | Value | Df | p-value |
|--------------------|-------|----|---------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 2.271 | 1  | 0.002   |

Tradition was also found to significantly influence the kind of food chosen. The chi-square value obtained was 2.271 with a p-value of 0.002. For the individuals whose food choices were influenced by tradition, majority were more likely to consumer food introduce to them from childhood as the staple food. This was similar to focus group discussion therefore the respondents believed foods mainly from other areas are hard to adapt and unfamiliar thus choosing to be rigid about food that have been available in the area.

#### **Social interaction**

**Table 4.4: Cross-tabulation for social interaction and food choices**

|                                               | Social interaction |     | Total |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----|-------|
|                                               | No                 | Yes |       |
| Does social interaction influence food choice | 18                 | 52  | 70    |
|                                               | 26                 | 34  | 60    |
| <b>Total</b>                                  | 44                 | 86  | 138   |

Social interactions include family, friends and social environment where an individual is able meet and socialize with other members of primary and secondary socialization. Majority of the respondents viewed family structures as household level of being engaged with other members of the society who have influence to change their ideas and bring new perception especially on food choices. The respondents were asked whether social interaction influenced their food choice and their response were as shown in the table below.

**Table 4.5: Chi-square test for social interaction and food choices**

|                    | Value | Df | p-value |
|--------------------|-------|----|---------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 4.479 | 1  | 0.034   |

The respondents were asked whether their social interactions informed their choice of food eaten. It was found that social interactions significantly influenced the kind of food eaten. Those who acknowledged that social interactions informed their food choices referred to peer influence especially in social gatherings and meetings in their talks with other individual they interacted. On the contrary, those who claimed that social interactions did not inform their food choices were more likely to prefer to eat on their own food choice without the influence of their peers. The chi-square value obtained for this test was 4.479 with a p-value of 0.034 which show significance. The respondents indicated that socialization is a process that took place consciously through influence from social gathering like “chamas” for women, while men are mostly influence in bars or drinking areas. This implies that

#### Social status

Social status is the social grouping of an individual according the resources available to those individuals consider in making food choice decisions. Respondents were asked what status mean and they believed that it include the state of the family at a particular period of time. Status to them included the availability of resources at a particular moment to be able to acquire more options

**Table 4.6: Cross-tabulation for social status and food choices**

|                                                          | Social status |    |       |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------|----|-------|
|                                                          | Yes           | No | Total |
| Does social status influence the kind of food you choose | 42            | 28 | 70    |
|                                                          | 34            | 26 | 60    |
| <b>Total</b>                                             | 76            | 68 | 138   |

**Table 4.7: Chi-square test for social status and food choices**

|                    | Value | Df | p-value |
|--------------------|-------|----|---------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 3.597 | 1  | 0.008   |

The social status was found to significantly influence the kind of food. The chi-square value obtained was 3.597 with a p-value of 0.008. Those who acknowledged that social status influenced their food choices were more likely to eat out and variety of food other than the one at home. Social status also implied that these particular respondents were likely to be flexible with other foods available to them. Social status also referred to social grouping in which an individual feel they fit because the members belong to same level of education and earnings. Hence this reflect in the type of people one

the key motivational factors to engage in food choices are family support and favorable household conditions to bring change from previous believed ways.

The respondents said mere observation of other peoples’ behavior affects their liking of a food product. This was considered as a social facilitation effect which simply stated that effect the presence of other people has on our behavior or level of arousal. The focus group discussion finding suggests that the presence of other people affects the desire to eat food, and thus it also affects our food preferences to some degree. Majority of respondents believed that family and friend act as models as well as source of peer pressure. Most eating occurs in the presence of others especially when they are familiar compared to eating alone.

of food choices compared to other members of the society. Many respondents acknowledged that status is especially eating out generally done for enjoyment the food selected is rich in energy, fats and sugar and an individual is sometimes considered to be of higher status and especially certain type of foods. The respondents were asked whether social status influenced their food choices and their responses are as shown in the table below.

associate with and often find themselves eating together.

The respondents were asked on whether there is any knowledge on influence to food choices and their responses are as shown in the table below. Information is key for an individual to make their own decision and proper decision for that matter thus majority of the respondents believed the radio and TV act as a source of information which enhances what they believe in especially in terms of food choices. Majority of respondents viewed TV and listened to radios which were mainly in their native language thus could relate with what was

being taught which the food choices they had already decided.

**Table 4.8: Are you willing to seek further knowledge and skills on food choices?**

|                                  | Frequency  | Percent      |
|----------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Make an individual knowledgeable | 96         | 67.6         |
| Expensive                        | 26         | 19.7         |
| Availability                     | 18         | 12.7         |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>138</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Majority of the respondents, 67.6%, claimed that the food choices presented in mass media made an individual knowledgeable, 19.7% claimed it made the foods expensive while 12.7% claimed it made the food available. Most of TV shows programmes on foods which are expensive and with a lot of spices therefore most of the respondents only viewed TV programmes in their local language. Social-Cultural Factors Influencing Food Choices

The first objective of the study sought to determine the social cultural factors influencing food choices. The study found out that majority of the households create a social environment and family which plays a great role in food liking. In many circumstances most eating occurs in the presence of others, and cultural forces serve as a guide to how much we eat, when we eat and what we eat this is in line with. Allen (2009) who stated that cultural groups provide guidelines regarding what is acceptable foods. Family is a basic social unit where consumption of food takes place thus food is a form of social exchange that is of great importance in several cultures. Tradition is one of the elements of culture that is formed through information, beliefs and practices that are passed on from one generation to another. The study agrees with Berkman, (2009) notes that some traditional food practices and taboos in some societies may contribute to among particular groups of the population to have a traditional food pattern. In Kiambaa Sub County most of the respondents as the study found out are influenced by traditions which had been passed on from the former generation to the modern inhabitant of this area.

This study found that majority of the respondents had learned food practices from their parents and are still practicing what they had learned from other generations. The study affirms Kinyua (2014) that the family is the basic social unit where social values and behavior are formed, food being a social pattern which may be passed from childhood to adulthood and sometimes difficult to face alteration later in life. In some communities the societies many experience external influence because of urbanization however from this community the

households have maintained their tradition foods and beliefs in certain foods. Cultural ideals include the learned system of rules and plans shared by a group of people and provide the standards used as reference points by individuals to assess and judge food behaviors where the judgment is right, normal or inappropriate. Some respondents were quick to emphasize that even in hotel around if they do not have local foods then people are not likely to buy. Traditions develop out of familiar practices which arise from an area and the spread greatly and levels of adaptation depend on the close keen or socialization of families. The study found that food choice is a tradition undertaken whether ignorantly or aware of what is happening in a particular household.

The study agrees with Ares, G. & Gambaro, A. (2011) state that social cultural interaction develop peoples intention and actions in their experiences and personal communication thus understanding of this minimize misinterpretation, and misjudgment thus more insight of the community perspective and ability to develop mutual relations with other members of the society. To engage a community beliefs and behaviour are important for cultural encounter with the opportunity for achieving shared goals. Therefore there is cultural sensitivity through awareness and reduce biasness. The study found that members of the community are sensitive towards what they belief as cultural correct and to great extend asking questions seems to create a level defense to particular ways which have been accepted in the area.

This study found that food choice is undertaken as a tradition because it is continued irrespective of whether or not there is lesson or knowledge gained. To judge the tradition of the respondents the study showed that majority of the respondent engaged had stayed in the area for more than 20 years. This group represented 76.5% of the respondents. This was followed by 10.3% of the respondents who had stayed in the village for more than 16 years, and then 7.4% who had stayed for between 11 years - 15 years. 2.9% of the respondents had stayed in the



village for between 5- 10 years and another 2.9% had stayed for less than 5 years. The findings revealed that majority of the households had either learned or adopted new food patterns within the period they had stayed in the area. Past influences and historical eras, and transitions and anticipations of future events e.g. upbringing, characteristics of an age or generation, past life roles affected respondent's relationship with food. People coordinated the demand of current life roles and activities through their food choices.

The study found that early socialization practice emphasize primary role of women as mothers and wives thus influence girls expectations for future choices this is the thought with Kiriti et al (2011). African culture is a not balanced because of culturally sanctioned biases against women and provides excuses for men. Kiriti et al (2011) added that cultural biases operate at all levels ranging from national, institutional level, government policy, community level and household level .Cultural orientation is present in every interaction which is an indicator of a person behavior and altitudes. Therefore cultural identity is an ongoing process as a person is exposed to more different values and behavior which people choose to adopt or not. Cultural identity is constructed within the individual but continually influenced by the interaction among people in the society. Culturally identity is informed by socio cultural perspectives that one interact with hence forming and learning certain characteristic. Culture is combination of thoughts, altitudes, values and behaviour that are shared by a social group of people.

This study found that a social interaction occurs through socialization in the society which is a process that occurs through an individual life time. The basic social unit is the family where an individual significant people influence a person behavior and choices they make in life. The different households' use the categories and rules of their cultures, subcultures or an ethnic group to decide what is acceptable and preferable to eat. Culture can be seen as sort of collective memory that influences individual behaviors and therefore influence of culture is rooted in a combination of several factors( Allen *et al* 2011). The respondents were asked whether their social interactions informed their choice of food eaten. It was found that social interactions significantly influenced the kind of food eaten. Those who acknowledged that social interactions informed their food choices were more likely to prefer food eaten in social gathering. On the contrary, those who claimed that social

interactions did not inform their food choices were more likely to eating alone.

This study found that social desirability and social approval are likely to be important issues to take into consideration in assessing food choices which is in line with the perspective of Ares (2011). An individual learns these rules early in life and exerts a powerful force when it comes to food choice and preferences throughout our lives. The closest reference groups such as family and peers provide several opportunities for modeling and reinforcing the common food choices as well as sensory likes and dislikes. The study found that food choice event results from the mixing and separating of the diverse set of social and cultural inputs. Life course gives rise to and shapes the influences that emerge in a food choice situation as well as the manner and extent to which the social and cultural settings affect how people construct and execute personal systems of food choice.

This study found a statistically significant in social status routine patterns in a particular type of food in certain household in Kiambaa Sub County. The respondent who acknowledged that social status influenced their food choices were more likely to eat out and variety of food other than the one at home. Social status also implied that these particular respondents were likely to be flexible with other foods available outside their home Food choice strategies include elimination, limitation, substitution, addition, modification, and routinization; these strategies make food choice more automatic or habitable (Devine *et al* 2003). Food choice expectations and plans for acting are procedural knowledge people hold for food behaviors in specific situations that are familiar to them. They provide predictability and comfort. The social relations are sustained by trust, common values, levels of reciprocity and solidarity potentially triggers influencing others on food choices. Sorensen *et al* (1998) shows that social support groups and peers have a beneficial effect on food choices in emphasis on commitment and meeting expectations.

This study found that family background, experience and perception shared to the household contribute to formation of their attitudes and the social status associated towards food choices. While food choices challenges are true the household can bring new ideas and practices thus encourage proper food choices. Thus, the family need to practice proper socialization by incorporating new social values related to foods. Children in a household are the next generation therefore when information and

values are instilled they go a long way in enhancing change. Therefore, the findings provide factual information to support of Berkman (2009) in that social status promotes a sense of belonging and food behaviour. The study found out that social relations that result from social status evolve to facilitate and coordinate economic, social and political actions. The social status triggers a level of solidarity among members of the community and are reciprocal in nature through common values and similar choices. Most of the social groups originate from the traditional African concept of collective organizations social groups formed for common purpose for example social protection, social identity, choices and common values.

This study revealed that household social status towards food choices are formed through; household experience, influence of parents, friends, and peers and the general community thus modeling and emulating in different stages of life According to Beardworth and Lancashire (2002) the influence of the environment on food habits derives from a composite of ecological and social factors. Social framework which include the nature of interpersonal relationships, social roles and meaning; families and households provided one of the most important sets of interpersonal relationships influencing food choice for example the study found a situation where the mother who is trying to provide for her fussy eater; another mother trying to shape the food choices of her family; the husband who gets the list from his wife; shopper who sacrifices her own priorities to meet the family's needs, entertaining and workplace are interpersonal relationship influencing food choice. Thus many household are influenced by social status in determination of food choices and the particular groupings to fit in the society which have the same food practices.

This study found that 59.6% of the respondent effectively supported that food choices has good benefits. Mass media moderately influenced food choices as majority of respondents didn't have time to listen and watch programs about food while traditions efficiently affected the food choice. According to the research, 62.5% of the respondents believed that media programs make an individual knowledgeable while 19.2% of the respondents felt it makes the food expensive. The major factors influencing the food choice among male and female of Kiambaa sub county is social support. This is supported by 42.3% of the respondent as opposed to 30.8% who believed that price affected the choice of food and 26.9% who believed that perceived benefits influenced the food choice.

## 5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summary

This study found that factors influencing food choice on 138 respondents, primarily individuals who make food choice decisions, who were sampled for their views. These people were asked about how they chose foods decision and what influenced their choices. The questions were analyzed using qualitative methods that included constant comparison, concept mapping, and case summaries. The respondents in Kiambaa Sub County explained that life course experiences affected major influences on food choice that included ideals, personal factors, resources, social contexts and the food context. These influences informed the development of personal systems for making food choices that incorporated value negotiations and behavioral strategies. Personal, household, and community situations and barriers, as well as learning are prospective are ongoing, and they are passed from one generation to another. Individuals' alterations in behavior are ultimately the result of change in the functioning of the central nervous system i.e. whatever affects the brain affects behavior. The central nervous system is key in understanding of brain and behavior connections.

### Background characteristic of the respondents

The background characteristic of the respondents considered the age, gender, educational attainment, the period the respondent has lived in an area, marital status of the respondent in Kiambaa Sub County. This study consisted of females representing 56.52% of all the individuals while male respondents were 43.48%. Female headed households are accorded all privileges and respect as male. The results revealed majority of the individuals were in the age bracket of between 46-55 years. This age bracket represented 49 % of the sample. It was followed by those in the age bracket of between 55 years and above, standing at 36%. Then represented were those in the age brackets of between 36 - 45 years with 32% and those above 25-35 years old which stood at 19% each. The study found respondents. The study finding reveal 88 % of the respondents were married while 19% were windows. Further 10 % of the respondents were single while 10 % were separated. Most of the respondents had tertiary education representing 49.2% while 57% of the respondents had secondary education and 32% had achieved primary level of education. The study found that the respondent had different time frame when they had lived in the area 76.5% had lived more than 20 years followed by 10.3% of the respondents who had stayed in the village for more than 16 years, and then 7.4% who

had stayed for between 11 years - 15 years. 2.9% of the respondents had stayed in the village for between 5- 10 years and another 2.9% had stayed for less than 5 years.

#### **Socio-cultural factors influencing food choices**

This study found that traditions guide values that are generally acceptable which influence an individual behaviour and attitude towards the choices and especially for this study food choices. Majority of the respondent were comfortable with their tradition of foods however they found it hard to mix with other groups who were practicing different choices. . The chi-square value obtained was 2.271 with a p-value of 0.002. For the individuals whose food choices were influenced by tradition, majority were more likely to consumer food introduce to them from childhood as the staple food. The study found that social interactions significantly influenced the kind of food eaten. Those who acknowledged that social interactions informed their food choices referred to peer influence especially in social gatherings and meetings in their talks with other individual they interacted. . The chi-square value obtained for this test was 4.479 with a p-value of 0.034 which show significance of social interaction to influence food choices.

The social status was found to significantly influence the kind of food. The chi-square value obtained was 3.597 with a p-value of 0.008. Those who acknowledged that social status influenced their food choices were more likely to eat out and variety of food other than the one at home Majority of the respondents, 67.6%, claimed that the food choices presented in mass media made an individual knowledgeable, 19.7% claimed it made the foods expensive while 12.7% claimed it made the food available..

#### **Conclusion**

This section presents conclusions of the study based on theoretical and empirical findings of factors that influence towards food choices behaviour and attitudes.

#### **Theoretical Conclusion**

Structural functionalism theory and social learning theory are major theoretical perspective in sociology locate choices, preference and behaviour within broader structural framework. Sociological enquiry and explanation typically begins from exploration of behaviour and trying to find evidence of group specific practice. The context play a strong role in food behaviour and different context are dominated by different people and social or environmental structure. The two theories are interested in social order and socialization of society to achieve stability and solidarity. Social learning theory argues that

learning occurs within the social context where people learn from one another through imitation, observation and modeling. This study confirms this theory by establishing household attitude and behaviour learning from the cultural settings .The study found factoring influencing food choices from the social interactions, traditions and the general community. The structure functionalism theory appreciates the role of social learning process in fostering social values and promoting social stability. Structural functionalism theory is guided by the assumption that each part of society produces order, stability and productivity. When one part of the system is not working or is dysfunctional it affects all other parts and create social problem. A sociological model of behavior; incorporates contextual factors that may influence or limit one's ability to act on their intentions. Contextual factors included socioeconomic and demographic variables, and community characteristics, which may limit access to organic and local foods. Assumes that consumers choose products whose attributes, consequences and values reflect consumers' goal in other words, they buy products for the functional and psychological benefits they provide.

#### **Empirical Conclusion**

This study findings and observation reveal that factors influencing food choices are social cultural which include traditions, social interaction and social status. Study finding relating to social cultural factors were subjected to chi-square. The finding established a statically significance on social interaction to influence food choices attitude and behaviour at household level. Social status was also found to influence food choices through the use of chi-square. Tradition was also found to be key influence of social cultural influencing food choice.

#### **Recommendations**

This study makes a number of recommendations for policy that need to be put in place and enhance proper food choice. The findings also present recommendations on areas for further research to be undertaken. The first objective of the study sought to determine the social cultural factors influencing household behaviour and attitude towards household food choices. This study found that social cultural play a vital role in influencing food choices. However the study did not cover influence of religion to food choices thus that is area of interest especially in community which the social taboos play a big role.

In addition to supportive supervision, appropriate indicators, together with methods, tools and clear accountability for timely collection and analysis in

food choices is important from time to time. This will enhance comparative study with different study that can be carried out randomly in different area. It also bring different dynamics that relate to food choices especially in understanding food cycles. In addition there can be advocacy is a key approach to mobilize for resources and partnership to build support for the better understanding of food choices. According to the findings of the current study, there are many factors influencing food choices that many households have not thought about. Therefore, learning about food choices is important at a household level then information than can be passed to other members of the community. Therefore home based management of food choices and members of the household embracing the key changes.

The community needs to promote, support and present food believes as lessons passed on from one generation to another. The community needs to pass information to other members of the community who learn information that is beneficial and in making the right food choices. Thus the community needs to access appropriate and culturally relevant information on food choices and strategy to address issues at every level where individual are bound to make choices.

This study found that parent and other caretakers have a role to play thus this study advocates for supportive supervision and adequate monitoring and evaluation of the strategic approaches to food choices. The other stakeholders are the education system can be instrumental in enhancing supervision role and encouraging behaviour change.

Household food choices need to be encouraged by targeted operational and other research as well as promote utilization of the research findings. The research findings shall inform the already existing policy and guide. This help in recommending of new policies or improving on already existing policies. Better living requires an understanding of cultural factors since they lead habitual consumption of

certain foods and in tradition of preparation and in certain cases can lead to restriction of certain foods. This is enhanced through combined efforts of learning institutions promoting good food practice by integrating intervention measures in school activities.

The society need to embrace gender sensitive infrastructure and the community to be sensitized on gender issues by organizing the community in gender focused groups to review gender needs, priorities and concerns. Also conduct regular activities to assess the impact of intervention on gender issues.

Households should, where possible, develop and maintain kitchen gardens to raise and provide fruit, vegetables, poultry and other small animals. The kitchen supplements food for the household especially in the rising cost of foods.

#### **Further Research**

This study sought to explore and document factors influencing food choices toward household behaviour and attitudes. The study adopted a descriptive research design however another study can be undertaken using longitudinal approach to cover a longer period of time. The following are recommendation for further research the influence of workplace on food choices and the influence of mass media on food choices. First with the majority of adult women and men in employment, the influence of work on behaviors such as food choices is an important area of investigation. This is an area that has many gaps that can be addressed by proper understanding of work place and the environment. Secondary this study also recommends further research on food choices in coping mechanisms of household or families dealing with economic hardship and other misfortunes, such AIDS. Thirdly this study recommends of food choices in transition ages of human life and its impact in a household.

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